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ABSTRACT

Student Affirmative Action (SAA) outreach programs to increase the participation of underrepresented minorities and the economically disadvantaged in higher education in California started with little or no coordination and scant thought of evaluation. For a variety of reasons, which include how they were planned, how they are staffed and administered, how they are funded, and why they exist, very little serious evaluation of the programs has occurred. After 20 years of experience it is difficult, if not impossible, to say from a public policy or research perspective what types of interventions work with what types of students to what degree. It is speculated that for this to change among state-funded programs, the state will have to be more serious in demanding rigorous evaluation and, perhaps, promote program consolidation. However, the fundamental SAA concerns may be evolving and creating new programs and practices in need of evaluation. (Author/TE)

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April 1984

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Presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting, American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 23, 1984 as part of a symposium "Research and Evaluation Projects"

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Abstract

Student affirmative action outreach programs to increase the participation of underrepresented minorities and the economically disadvantaged in higher education in California started with little or no coordination and scant thought of evaluation. For a variety of reasons, which include how they were planned, how they are staffed and administered, how they are funded, and why they exist, very little serious evaluation of the programs has occurred. After 20 years of experience it is difficult, if not impossible, to say from a public policy or research perspective what types of interventions work with what types of students to what degree. It is speculated that for this to change among state-funded programs, the state will have to be more serious in demanding rigorous evaluation and, perhaps, promote program consolidation. However, the fundamental SAA concerns may be evolving and creating new programs and practices in need of evaluation.

Evaluation After the Fact: Some Comments on Student Affirmative Action Outreach Programs in California[1]

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In some regions of the United States, the major thrust in postsecondary education of the civil rights movement in the 1960's was the desegregating of college campuses. In other regions, the thrust was a more refined aspect of access, the attempt to increase the participation of underrepresented minorities and the economically disadvantaged in higher education and, thus, in the mainstream of American political, professional, and economic life.

The University of California founded its Educational Opportunity Program in 1964 to encourage enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students and to provide support services for them on campus. In the same year the Berkeley Upward Bound program was started to work with disadvantaged youth in the high schools, a program that evolved to become a cornerstone of the federal Trio Programs.

The two major components of contemporary student affirmative action programs have, thus, been in place since the 1960's. The first component is the assistance of students as they come to and through the door of higher education, broadly known as support services, and the second, the identifying, informing, motivating, and academically preparing students for college while they are still in junior or senior high school or community college, broadly termed outreach programs.

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[1]Paper presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting, American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984, as part of a symposium "Research and Evaluation Projects."

The evaluation issues are complex in both components, but it seems likely that the difficulties are greater for outreach programs, which are the focus of these remarks. Outreach programs typically are more diverse along such key dimensions as fund sources, administrative sponsorship, personnel, program content, and clientele.

Ten years ago, when Black participation in postsecondary education was beginning to decline after having made marked gains in the preceding decade, and when Hispanic enrollments were beginning to level off despite a rapidly increasing population in California, the State Legislature made an attempt to address the problem of minority underrepresentation in higher education and coordinate the diverse efforts being made to overcome it. It passed Assembly Concurrent Resolution 151 which resolved:

> That the Regents of the University of California, the Trustees of the California State University and Colleges, and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges are hereby requested to prepare a plan that will provide for addressing and overcoming, ...ethnic, economic, and sexual underrepresentation in the makeup of the student bodies of institutions of public higher education as compared to the general ethnic, economic, and sexual composition of recent California high school graduates, and to submit such plan to the California Postsecondary Education Commission on or before July 1, 1975. The California Postsecondary Education Commission shall integrate and transmit the plans to the Legislature with its comments by the first legislative day of 1976. The regents, the trustees, and the board of governors shall annually report to the California Postsecondary Education Commission, on or before July 1 of each year, which shall integrate and transmit the reports to the Legislature by December 31 of each year with evaluations and recommendations, on their progress, including specification as to what obstacles stand in the way of implementation of the plan... (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1982, Appendix A)

As this resolution indicates, it introduced the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) into an evaluating, reporting, and quasi-coordinating role for these outreach programs.

And what is CPEC? It describes itself as follows:

> The California Postsecondary Education Commission was created by the Legislature and the Governor in 1974 as the successor to the California Coordinating Council for Higher Education in order to coordinate and plan for education in California beyond high school. As a state agency, the Commission is responsible for assuring that the State's resources for postsecondary education are utilized effectively and efficiently; for promoting diversity, innovation and responsiveness to the needs of students and society; and for advising the Legislature and the Governor on statewide educational policy and funding. (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1982, inside cover)

By 1979 postsecondary educational institutions in California were widely involved with the secondary schools in student affirmative action outreach. Programs were run by the University of California (UC) system, with nine campuses; by the California State University (CSU) system (formerly the state college system), with 19 campuses; by the community colleges, with 106 campuses; by cooperative enterprise among private industry, educational organizations, and the State; and by regional consortia. In addition, the State's Department of Education had its programs.

For the fiscal year 1982-83, the total cost of these programs was $15 million, not counting the contributions of private industry (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). Of the $15 million, three quarters of a million came from fees paid by students in the UC system and the remainder was about evenly divided between the state and federal government. However, the governmental

dollars came through a variety of agencies and it would be wrong to think there was the possibility of direct accountability to a single or even a small number of governmental entities.

Evaluating Outreach Programs in California

With this history, scope, and complexity of outreach programs in California, and the diversity of actors involved, it is appropriate to wonder what has been done about evaluation. Has the Postsecondary Education Commission brought order to the programs? After 20 years of programs and 10 years of reporting, can the Legislature, or anyone else, count on knowing which activities or interventions actually increase the pool of college-bound underrepresented students and which do not? Are the various segments and programs working carefully together, dividing the daunting task of increasing the college-going aspirations and skills of educationally and economically disadvantaged minority youth?

The answer is no. There has been some evaluation worthy of the name and there is some cooperation. But the most important challenge from a public policy perspective is to face up to the confusion and the failures.

Why are we where we are? With the advantage of hindsight, not all of the answers are complicated and I set forth a few. I do so, however, in more of an evolutionary than priority perspective.

First, the extent and significance of minority underrepresentation in higher education was appreciated only gradually, though once identified the concern gained force quite rapidly. It has been a tide that has come in and never gone out. Since the problem was

underestimated, the initial piecemeal efforts to "be helpful and do something" did not build evaluation into their plans. In fact, the field of evaluation itself was just being identified and elaborated as a distinct enterprise. Economic times in the late 1960's were far different from in the late 1970's and early 1980's--no taxpayer's revolt--and there was little of the competition for resources which has since bred hard questions and the need for data.

The outreach programs themselves were seldom, if ever, designed by experts. Usually they were dreamed up by an administrator or a committee, and serious reviews of the plans by knowledgeable social scientists and subject area specialists were never made. Sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists who understand social class differences, cultural and linguistic complexities, and the problems of social change, were not consulted.

In the University of California system implementation of the outreach program concept was handed to the Office of Relations with Schools, the recruiting and information-disseminating arm of the undergraduate admissions activity. These staffs in general were not educators or trained to be program planners or managers, and the frequent result was that programs without the built-in corrective of evaluation were developed and run by people working outside of their expertise. Each of the nine University campuses, of course, had its own programs.

Then, eventually, came the need to know results. The first requests for information, both from the campus and the University's central Office of the President, were quite broad. The questions came from administrators who, themselves, were generalists and

had helped establish the programs, and the replies were simply descriptive information and were considered quite satisfactory.

After all, outreach programs to increase the number of students who would go on to college could not be expected to have demonstrable results for at least five years if they began working with seventh graders. The logic was sufficiently unassailable that the Post-secondary Education Commission was content to describe the activities in progress to the Legislature; the Legislature appropriated increased funding to extend services to the eighth graders who had been seventh graders (and eventually on up the ladder); the University was able to demonstrate concerned action; and so on.

Some outreach program managers did make a stab at more formal evaluation. Some looked at how-to-do-it books and kits (e.g., Weiss, 1972; Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, and Henerson, 1978); others sought out graduate students to hire part-time or to develop evaluation class projects for their programs. Only a few bought into evaluation activities in a meaningful, sustained way.

Gradually all of the actors came under more pressure. Five years passed, the enrollment imbalance in higher education did not go away, and the pointed enrollment and demographic projections for the 1980's and 1990's demanded economic and political attention to a problem that had started as a human values and equity issue. Each campus brought in its student or institutional research specialists to help; the University's central administration, through which the bulk of the funding was channeled, hired a professional trained in research to work with the programs; CPEC devoted more staff time to its responsibilities and became more aggressive; and the

Legislature became more insistent about accountability. The University formed a systemwide Research and Evaluation Committee within its central division of Admissions and Outreach Services. It also discussed evaluation at each of its annual outreach conferences.

The most persistent and intractable evaluation problems from an administrative and public policy perspective now appear to involve at least some of the following elements:

- The outreach programs in the state are extremely diverse in nature, have somewhat differing objectives, and practically defy description with terms, phrases, or definitions which have a common meaning across programs. Within the UC system alone a great deal of time has been spent just attempting to develop a few common terms and data elements for reporting purposes.
- The programs are run by so many different entities or agencies that there is no simple way to hold them accountable to common standards. Many egos and a lot of personal turf are involved.
- The programs have, in aggregate, become major employers. Change cannot be considered without raising a great deal of anxiety, and the political environment is very complex.
- Because evaluation was not built in at the beginning, all of the money for the programs, with few exceptions, is devoted to service and salaries. To require serious evaluation now and insist that it come out of existing program dollars means that service and/or program staff must be cut. And if evaluation is not paid for from program money, where will the money come from? From the State, which has been

in financial agony and had to starve education across the board? From the university's or college's instructional dollars? From student fees?

- The programs are administered by people selected, and self-selected, as service providers, not people whose main temperamental focus and style is analytical and managerial. Evaluation is likely to be seen as a threat, rather than as a management tool and friend. Even the people of high authority in academe to whom the outreach staff report are frequently not well equipped by temperament, training, and experience to oversee outreach programs. Many are former faculty members whose experience has been with academic departments. The history and chemistry departments have been teaching their courses for years and know they work. Those programs are not on trial in the sense that a pioneering outreach program is. So how does one deal with a social-educational program that might actually not succeed in its difficult objective and certainly will need continual tuning? And how does one deal with those politics?
- Even among the actors who understand and are predisposed toward management and evaluation, there is concern about loss of autonomy. Can the program manager safely pass along evaluative data to the central administration, and the central administration to CPEC, and CPEC to the Legislature without loss of independence and control? And what if the data are not uniformly favorable?

What Might Be Done Now

There is now less room in California for graceful movement, and the probability of upheaval and earthquake with these programs has increased. People eventually make judgments of programs with or without facts. Evaluation in this sense cannot be avoided. The outreach programs which have not really understood or been able to act on program evaluation and have not incorporated evaluation into themselves (or asked for evaluation by others) could face abrupt change from outside.

The State is having to use its funding authority to get action in both cooperation among programs and in evaluation, and considerable consolidation of programs across the three major public sectors of higher education in California is a possibility being openly discussed. This would capture and coordinate control of a major portion of the outreach activity, which has grown with little plan and much autonomy. It would also permit the introduction of serious program evaluation, although that would have to be planned and would not occur automatically. The pain and anguish of establishing this coordination and control would be considerable, and there would be some programmatic losses as well, but it may be necessary if there is to be accountability and the possibility of change.

Another tried and true procedure being used by the State is the differential funding of programs, rewarding those which provide the best evidence of success. This can accomplish change over time but does not build coordination in and of itself.

Other changes and possibilities exist. A shift in terms has been occurring. The mid-1970's focus on "pool-building," i.e., increasing the number of appropriately prepared and motivated minority high school youth, is giving way in part to "access" and "facilitation" on the one hand and systemic strengthening of existing courses and teachers, especially in mathematics and English ("basic skills" and "educational renewal") on the other. In this process a redefinition of the outreach activities takes place. The preparation component goes to more academically grounded segments of the college campus, while the recruiting arm continues to work on saturating the target populations with information about higher education and helping students apply. These moves may, in fact, be more effective for the general purposes of student affirmative action, but they are not necessarily a move toward more evaluation.

All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't help Humpty-Dumpty, and it may be idealistic to imagine a state legislature or even changing times can do better with a scattered array of outreach programs. But there is a chance; the job could be done.

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